



ENGAGE

75 YEARS
**INCREDIBLE
HOSPITALITY**





We add flavour to your business.

Whether you are a restaurant, a fast food outlet, a catering service or a bakery serving cuisines from around the world, choose from our range of quality products and get the taste of success.

Mayonnaise | Ketchup, Sauces & Dips | Pizza & Pasta Sauces

Salad Dressings & Emulsions | Mustards | Gravies | Ganache, Fillings & Icings

Fruit & Chocolate Toppings | Sugar Based Syrups | Flavoured Syrups



For business enquiries contact: VEEBA FOOD SERVICES PRIVATE LIMITED. Office No. 101, 1st Floor, Pegasus One (Inside IBIS Hotel Complex) Golf Course Road, Sector 53, Gurugram, Haryana 122002 | T: +0124 4653250 | www.veeba.in

From the President's Desk



From being a lifestyle choice, it emerged as a huge business opportunity. Driven by urbanisation, demographic developments and increase in spending power, the travel and hospitality industry saw a significant transformation. The Indian traveller too had come of age and had become more discerning. This saw the advent of niche hotels targeting specific clientele, leading to the trend of airport hotels, MICE hotels, wellness hotels, ski resorts, and beach resorts. The industry succeeded in exciting interest not only in the domestic market, but also globally.

One cannot look at the future without reflecting upon the learnings from the past. As we celebrate India's milestone 75th Year of Independence, I look back at the long, tireless journey traversed by the Hospitality industry. A commemorative moment is a good time to rewind and reflect on the distance travelled, the goals met, the lessons learnt and plan for the road ahead.

India was first introduced to the world of hospitality by the British in colonial times as they set up hotels in cities such as Calcutta, Mumbai, Delhi, and at the country's many breath-taking hill stations. In 1903, the mantle of Indian hospitality was established by Jamsetji Tata, who built the Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai. This was followed by The Ashok and The Imperial in Delhi, which was part of Lutyens' vision. The Taj Mahal Palace Mumbai is the first structure in India to be registered under the Image Trademark, and joins the exclusive list of iconic buildings such as the Eiffel Tower and the Empire State Building. Today, Indian Hospitality is renowned the world over—and that's the most fitting tribute for a country which believes that Guest is God.

The rapid increase in the middle class after the economic reforms of the 1990s, along with the rise of budget airlines in 2005, had a great impact on the hospitality sector.

Not only is India recognized on the global tourism map but is also seen as a market with significant investment potential. The industry contributes 6.8 per cent to the overall Indian GDP and accounts for over 8 per cent of India's total employment—impacting millions of lives and livelihoods. And while the past year has definitely been a challenge for the sector, we truly believe that we will emerge stronger from this and there are exciting times ahead for us.

This special Edition of HAI ENGAGE celebrates some iconic moments in the journey of Indian hospitality. What can be a better way to celebrate India's 75th Year of Independence, than with the Taj, the hallmark of Indian hospitality, being rated as the **World's Strongest Hotel Brand 2021**, by the UK-based brand valuation consultancy, Brand Finance, elevating India's position on the global travel and tourism map.

We are dedicating the entire year to celebrating the 75th Year of India's Independence—glimpses of which you will see throughout.

A very Happy Independence Day to all!

Puneet Chhatwal

President, Hotel Association of India
MD & CEO, The Indian Hotels Company Limited



**HOTEL ASSOCIATION
OF INDIA**

Copyright@Hotel Association of India, New Delhi

Volume 1, Issue 4, July-August 2021

Edited, Printed and Published by
Hotel Association of India
B 212-214, Somdutt Chambers-1,
Bhikaji Cama Place,
New Delhi-110066, India
T +91 11 26171114, 26171110
hai@hotelassociationofindia.com;
info@hotelassociationofindia.com
www.hotelassociationofindia.com

Printed at

Thomson Press (India) Limited
Delhi-Mathura Road, Faridabad -121 007, Haryana

Editor & Publisher

Hotel Association of India
info@hotelassociationofindia.com

Managing Editor

Niti Singh Bhandari

Content & Marketing



editorhai@consociaadvisory.com

Design

Satyam Grafix
satyamgrafix@gmail.com

Cover Photo

The Dandi March Statue, or the Gyarah Murti, pays tribute to Mahatma Gandhi's peaceful protest in 1930, against the salt taxes imposed by the British. It was created by renowned sculptor Deviprasad Roychowdhury

Cover Story Photos

Courtesy: The Ashok, New Delhi; The Imperial, New Delhi; Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL); The Lalit Suri Hospitality Group; The Oberoi Group; The Raj Palace, Jaipur

Editorial enquiries

(concerning reproducing of article)
editorhai@consociaadvisory.com

Advertising enquiries

info@consociaadvisory.com

Disclaimer

All information in HAI ENGAGE is derived from sources, which we consider reliable. The contents of this publication contain views of authors and are not the views of HAI ENGAGE.

The information given is as available at time of interview/printing as it may have changed since then.

All rights reserved. Reproduction strictly prohibited.

Material appearing in HAI ENGAGE cannot be reproduced in whole or in part without prior written permission. The same rule applies when there is a copyright or the article is taken from another publication. Publications reproducing material either in part or in whole without permission would face legal action.

The publisher assumes no responsibility for returning unsolicited material nor is he responsible for material lost or damaged in transit. Any material submitted to HAI ENGAGE will not be returned.

All advertisements must comply with the Indian Advertisements Code as well as the Advertisements Code of South Asia. The publisher will not be liable for any damage or loss caused by the late publication, error or failure or advertisement or editorial to appear.

CONTENTS



10

Guest Column

Remaining Resilient

Tweaking packages, showing empathy, and marking out a series of ambitious commitments for the next decade are some of the ways IHG plans to steer the bumpy road ahead.



12

LeaderSpeak

Trust and customer loyalty are vital to survival

In a freewheeling tete-a-tete, Puneet Chhatwal, President, Hotel Association of India, MD and CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), talks about the impact of the Covid storm, the plans for reboot and the huge role Hospitality will play in the country's economic revival.



16

Cover Story

ICONS OF TIMELESS LUXURY

Indian Hospitality is more than a splendid array of breath-taking amenities, that help to relax and rejuvenate. Some of the Hotels are world renowned landmarks, and the shortest route to a discovery of India. Pages of history come alive at some famous venues. And yet, they are in synch with the times, bringing in AI, IoT and AR tools, to elevate modern guest experiences.



42

Global Perspective

A shot of hope from vaccine certificates

It's important to open unhindered travel for vaccinated visitors for Tourism to claw out of the woods. Ensuring Covid-appropriate behaviour at all times will further break chains of despondency.



46

Destination

Gujarat - The Next Big Thing

We shine the spotlight on how Gujarat is steadily holding its own as a hospitality and tourism hub. By Riaan Jacob George



51

The Last Word

Has Covid-19 changed Tourism & Hospitality?

Change happens. Embrace it. Reset growth by focusing on sustainability and touchless services. However, the digital switch must not lose out on unique experiences



HAI meets Union Tourism Minister, submits recommendation for Industry revival

Hotel Association of India (HAI), the apex body of the Indian hospitality industry met the Union Minister of Culture, Tourism and Development of North East Region, Shri G. Kishan Reddy and apprised him of the status of the Industry that continues to be severely impacted by the ongoing pandemic. A delegation of the Association led by its Vice President, Mr. K.B. Kachru, Chairman Emeritus & Principal Advisor-South Asia, Radisson Hotel Group, also reviewed the issues that the industry is facing. Mr. M.P Bezbaruah, Secretary General, Dr. Jyotsna Suri, Corporate Member HAI and chairperson and managing director Bharat Hotels Ltd., Mr. Rohit Khosla, Member HAI & Executive VP, IHCL, and Ms. Charulata Sukhija, Deputy Secretary General, HAI were also a part of the delegation.

While highlighting the urgent need

to infuse liquidity in the Industry through means like an extension of moratorium, one-time loan restructuring, improved terms under the ECLGS scheme and revised eligibility ratios under the resolution framework, the Association also requested a consideration of policy changes.

According to hospitality the status of an "Infrastructure industry" by the central government allowing it to avail the benefits of low cost funding and tax benefits that are currently available to industries like ports, railways, highways etc. is one of the policy changes that the industry has been voicing for a long time now. Hotels are capital intensive and have a long gestation period similar to infrastructure industries.

Encouraging all the Indian States to accord hotels the status of an

"Industry" as recently notified by some States is another policy recommendation articulated by the delegation to support the revival and long term thrival of the industry. A large percentage of hotel operating costs are fixed in nature making them unsustainable under the current conditions. "Industry" status will allow hotels to receive the benefits available to manufacturing like lower property taxes, land at subsidized rates, lower costs of utilities like power and water.

HAI offered to be a part of the task force formed by the government to aid the Industry's survival, revival and long term thrival.

Giving a patient hearing to the delegation's pleas the minister assured to look into the issues and also to continue the dialogue with HAI. ■



INSPIRED ENGINEERING STUNNING WORK OF ART

Now, well-connected with the rest of the country

India's Statue of Unity - the world's tallest sculpture rising 182 meters into the sky overlooking a twelve square-kilometer lake, is a fitting tribute to one of its tallest leaders. The 67,000-tonne bronze and concrete sculpture is set amidst the scenic mountainous landscape of the Sardar Sarovar dam and attracts two and a half million visitors every year.

The site at Kevadia is now well-linked to the rest of the world - both by road and rail. There are new trains that connect the scenic spot with major metros such as Chennai, Mumbai, New Delhi and Ahmedabad.

INDIATOURISM MUMBAI

Ground Floor, Air India Building, Nariman Point, Mumbai 400 021

Telephone: 022-22043144 /22023145, Email: indiatourism-mum@nic.in

Toll Free Helpline: 1800-11-1363

IN THE NEWS

Ministry of Tourism's proposal to add tourism to Concurrent List welcomed by Standing Committee

The hospitality industry's long standing demand for tourism to be included in the Concurrent List proposed by the Ministry of Tourism has been welcomed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Transport, Tourism and Culture, which has stated that the step would help bring a "level playing field" to all stakeholders.

Hotel Association of India welcomed the Standing Committee's report presented to Parliament recently. Commenting on the development, Mr. Madan Prasad Bezbaruah said, "We welcome initiation of proposal by the Ministry of Tourism for including Tourism in the Concurrent List of Constitution. Once implemented, this will also play a key role in post-Covid recovery. Tourism activities and products differ from state to state. Placing tourism in the Concurrent list will facilitate seamless coordination. This will perhaps increase the quick implementation of schemes and pan-India face of Indian tourism."

UAE relaxes travel restrictions for Indian residents; ban on transit flights also lifted

The United Arab Emirates lifted the ban on entry of passengers from India and five other countries from 5 August, the National Emergency and Crisis Management Authority (NCEMA) said.



Those Indians who have a valid residency permit and are fully vaccinated - at least 14 days prior to the travel - are included in the exempted category.

The categories include medical workers, teachers at schools and universities in the Emirates, students, residents with extenuating circumstances, people undergoing medical treatment in the UAE and people who work for federal or local government agencies.

Interest free loan fund for Kerala hospitality, tourism workers

Kerala will be the first state to implement a 'Revolving Fund' in India, said PA Mohammad Riyas, Kerala Tourism Minister

"Covid-19: India to be removed from UK 'Red' travel list"

India will be moved off the UK's Red List, meaning tens of thousands of Indian students due to travel to the UK in the coming weeks, as well as others travelling from India to the UK will no longer be forced to stay in managed quarantine hotels for 10 days. Instead, they can quarantine at home or at the place they are staying.

UK transport secretary Grant Shapps MP said: "We are committed to opening up international travel safely, taking advantage of the gains we've made through our successful vaccination programme, helping connect families, friends and businesses around the world."

Key Highlights:

- ✓ National Medical & Wellness Tourism Board constituted to promote Medical/Wellness Tourism, AYUSH
- ✓ A draft National Strategy and Roadmap for Medical and Wellness Tourism formulated
- ✓ 'E- Medical Visa' introduced for 166 countries
- ✓ Assistance provided under Market Development Assistance (MDA) Scheme to medical/wellness Tourism Service Providers & Centres
- ✓ Medical & health tourism promoted at World Travel Mart (London), ITB, Berlin, Arabian Travel Mart etc.



COMING TOGETHER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

When we join hands, with the right intent, nothing is impossible.

Bowl of Hope, a purpose-driven, employee volunteering initiative launched by PepsiCo India, Quaker and United Way aimed at giving back to the community and making a difference.

Through this initiative, bowls of hope were donated to help children in underserved communities get the nutrition they need!



Distributed over **90,000** nutritious wholegrain bowls to underserved children in Delhi/NCR



Spread awareness about the benefits of nutrition and wellness

The ability to make a difference wouldn't be possible without the support and encouragement we receive from our stakeholders and partners.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

www.pepsicoindia.co.in





A 'revolving fund' which will provide interest free loans to up to 15 lakh workers in the hospitality and tourism sector including hotel and restaurant workers, tourist taxi and bus drivers, house-boat workers, tour operators, workers in the Ayurveda and wellness resorts, homestays, service apartments, amusement parks and people in the adventure tourism activities, is on the cards soon.

Importance of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) in Hospitality Industry

Sustainability is being incorporated into not only the industry's overall design strategies but also in day-to-day operations, including the implementation of practices and programmes that will help reduce hospitality's carbon footprint.

Both investors and travellers are increasing their awareness and taking note of companies environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices. For investors they are incorporating these facets into their overall asset decisions, while travellers are actively seeking out and booking more sustainable travel options. Due to this increase in demand, the hospitality industry's implementation and adoption of social, ethical and environmental responsibility has been accelerated and is changing the industry in a variety of more positive and sustainable ways.

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi inaugurates and dedicates PRASHAD projects in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh

Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi inaugurated various development projects in Varanasi which includes Tourist Facilitation Centre under the Project "Development of Varanasi Under PRASHAD Scheme – Phase II" and operation of Cruise Boat from Assi Ghat to RajGhat under the Project "Development of River Cruise in Varanasi under PRASHAD Scheme".

The 'National Mission on Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual, Heritage Augmentation Drive' (PRASHAD) is a Central Sector Scheme fully financed by the Government of India with the objective of integrated development of identified pilgrimage and heritage destinations.

Government has taken several steps to promote India as a Medical and Health Tourism Destination: Shri G Kishan Reddy

Ministry of Tourism has taken several steps to promote India as a Medical and Health Tourism Destination. In order to provide dedicated institutional framework to take forward the cause of promotion of Medical Tourism, Wellness Tourism and Yoga, Ayurveda Tourism and any other format of Indian system of medicine covered by Ayurveda, Yoga, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH).

Ministry of Tourism has formulated a draft National Strategy and Roadmap for Medical and Wellness Tourism.

Medical and health tourism have been specifically promoted at various international platforms such as World Travel Mart, London, ITB, Berlin, Arabian Travel Mart etc. Medical Visa' has been introduced.

Ministry of Tourism signs MOU with YATRA.COM to strengthen Hospitality & Tourism Industry

Ministry of Tourism, GoI to strengthen the Hospitality & Tourism Industry signed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Yatra.

The primary objective of this MoU is to provide extensive visibility to accommodation units, which have self-certified themselves on SAATHI (System for Assessment, Awareness & Training for the Hospitality Industry) on the OTA platform. The MoU also outlines both parties to encourage Units to register on NIDHI and thereby by on SAATHI and encourage local tourism Industry with appropriate safeguards for curbing spread of COVID-19.

Minister for Tourism Shri G. Kishan Reddy chairs BRICS Tourism Ministers' meeting

Minister for Tourism Shri G. Kishan Reddy chaired the BRICS Tourism Ministers' meeting, as part of India's BRICS chairship. The Ministers of all the member countries viz. Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa participated in the meeting. India organized the BRICS Tourism Ministers' Meeting as an effective means to promote tourism cooperation among BRICS countries. The meeting reviewed the intra BRICS Tourism cooperation. The significant aspect of the meeting was the adoption of the Ministers' Communique, an outcome document on cooperation and promotion of tourism between the BRICS countries.

Shri Reddy mentioned that the common tourism products in BRICS countries such as heritage & culture tourism, nature, wildlife, eco tourism etc., present an opportunity for greater cooperation and exchange of information and best practices.

Further, to promote tourism for the future, it was recognized that BRICS alliance for Green Tourism can accelerate the recovery and development of tourism on sustainable lines. ■

'Hospitality Solutions for the changing world'

Prama Hikvision's Smart Hospitality Solutions Help to Ensure Seamless Security Experience for Guests and Staff

The prolonged pandemic scenario has prompted the hospitality sector to enhance the security to the next level. Prama Hikvision offers Smart Hospitality Security Solutions to ensure a seamless security experience for guests and staff.



Integrated Security Solutions:

The Integrated Security Solutions include advanced systems in Video Surveillance, Access Control, Intrusion Alarm, and Perimeter Security. When these solutions are integrated with a Command and ControlCenter, they provide a better outcome in terms of proactive security management. Products: IP Video Security Cameras (CourVu and AcuSense), Video Walls, Access Control: Time and Attendance Systems, Facial Recognition Terminals, Intrusion Alarm (AX-Hub Kit), Perimeter Security Solution, X-ray Baggage Scanners, Smart Pole, Emergency Call Box, Door Frame Metal Detector, etc.

Temperature Screening Solution:

Hikvision Temperature Screening Solution, with multiple product types and wide range of applications, is designed for the detection of skin- surface temperatures so as to achieve rapid and safe preliminary screening with high efficiency. AI technology ensures Thermographic Cameras only detect human skin-surface temperature to reduce false alarms of other heat sources. Products: Thermal Cameras, Hand Held Thermal Cameras, Facial Recognition Terminal with Temperature Screening , Metal Detector Door etc.

Artificial Intelligence Applications:

Many successful deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications across the hospitality industry. AI enabled Facial Recognition Technology is driving innovations like VIP Guest Alerts and Personalised Greetings, etc. Products: Face Recognition Camera Technology

Broadcasting Solutions: For Special Events and Conferences

People Counting Solutions: Hikvision Dual Lens Cameras

Hotel Lobby –Hallway-Corridor: Hikvision Fish Eye Cameras

Conference Hall: Hikvision Fish Eye Cameras

Restricted Entry:

Facilitating the entry of RSVP confirmed guests by instant face recognition, identifying the unconfirmed guests, and also keeping a tab on the uninvited guests. Products: High Speed Entrance Solutions with Face Recognition Terminals

Perimeter Security:

Protecting the periphery of a hotel ground with the help of sophisticated Perimeter Protection Cameras, which come equipped with a Strobe Light and an audio output which get activated when an intruder comes within its range.

The Wireless Bridge Solution:

An ideal solution in an escalator environment - which acts as a communication agent to relay the feeds of the camera inside the lift to the router placed at the top of the building - leading to enormous savings in Cabling Costs, Maintenance Costs and Replacement Costs.

Alarm Systems:

Sophisticated Alarm Systems, which come in the form of mini call boxes and come equipped with a three-in-one mechanism - a call switch, a two-way communication, and a camera. Ideal for an emergency in cases of theft, fire or accidents. Product: Ax-Hub Kit and Smart Pole, Emergency Call Box, Panic Switch

Under-Vehicle Surveillance Solution (UVSS):

An information management system that integrates an automatic collection of underlying vehicle image, display, and storage functions, and eliminates the need for the manual and imperfect stick-and-mirror exercise. Product: Hikvision UVSS Solution

ANPR Solution:

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Camera Technology that uses intelligent systems to read and verify vehicle registration plates against a database, and marks the entry of any unregistered vehicles. Together with Barriers and Bollards, it works as an effective measure to ward off unwanted intruders. Product: Hikvision ANPR Camera

GUEST COLUMN

Remaining Resilient

“ Tweaking packages, showing empathy, and marking out a series of ambitious commitments for the next decade are some of the ways IHG plans to steer the bumpy road ahead. ”

Sudeep Jain, Managing Director, South-West Asia, InterContinental Hotels Group



Having survived myriad upheavals and natural disasters like the tsunami, acts of terrorism such as 9/11, the global financial meltdown in 2008, and the slowdowns due to infectious diseases like SARS and others, at various places of the world at various times, the Hospitality industry has displayed its resilient side often.

The Covid-19 pandemic has deeply impacted the sector. With global and local restrictions on movement since early last year, there have been numerous interruptions. While the social and economic disruptions have drastically altered the industry's outlook, with the ease of restrictions now, the recovery signs are visible again. As we see multiple positive developments, we understand that a complete reboot will take time and may vary across markets.

Globally, as well as on home turf, there's a huge improvement in consumer confidence as vaccines roll out effectively. This shows that the consumers' appetite for travel has not changed. It's a natural human motivation to explore the world, re-connect with friends and family, and build memories. On the other hand, the wheels of business must turn and events need to be held. As people are eagerly making travel plans, there is a surge in bookings and our hotels are ready to welcome guests warmly once again.

With leading brands, a resilient business model and strong cost control measures, we are bracing with confidence. The safety and wellbeing of our colleagues and guests is of huge importance to us. Our hotels provide the "IHG Clean Promise" to reassure guests that their stay will meet the highest standards of hygiene. We are investing in our brands,

embracing technology to minimise human contact, and deploying colleague trainings across our entire global estate.

We are in solidarity with our colleagues, their families, and our communities. Many IHG hotels in India worked with the government and local authorities towards multiple relief and recovery measures. During these distressing times, we also witnessed the determination of people who came together, showing examples of fortitude and generosity. Many of our colleagues at IHG went beyond the call of duty to care for our guests, for each other, and their community. We are incredibly proud of them.

Our asset-light approach and leading position in the mainstream segment has helped us. Globally, we have continued to outperform our peers in key markets, as 70 per cent of our hotels fall in the midscale and the upper midscale segments. During the lower demand periods, we observed that RevPAR in these segments fell less than the industry average. Our growth driver in India has always been the Holiday Inn Brand family, which includes Holiday Inn, Holiday Inn Resorts and Holiday Inn Express hotels. These brands held out strongly through the pandemic.



Additionally, to adapt to the evolving consumer needs and recognizing the importance of our valued loyalty members, we have special offers and customized packages. This ensures that our guests get more value when they stay or dine at our hotels, hold events or use our facilities for purposes such as working from the hotel, and so on

Despite the challenges, we remain on track, expanding IHG's presence across key markets in the country, with new openings. Our owners share our confidence in our brands and recognize the long-term prospects of the sector.

We are sharply focussed on the health of our business. The hospitality sector has always seen a vibrant demand in emerging markets, stimulated by the increase in disposable incomes and low-cost travel. Before the pandemic,

“ IHG's programme “Journey to Tomorrow” is a series of commitments to make a positive difference to our People, Communities and the Planet, over the next decade ”

the industry enjoyed consistent growth for over a decade.

The industry touches the lives of many. We strive to do the right thing for every stakeholder. We are driven by our purpose of “True Hospitality for Good”. We aim to make everyone feel special, cared for, and respected, whether it's our guests, our partners, our colleagues or the communities in our eco-system. We recently launched “Journey to Tomorrow”, a series of ambitious commitments to make a positive difference to our People, Communities and the Planet, over the next decade.

We are working at the micro-level to shape the future of responsible travel. The world is there to be explored, and market by market, people are getting back to doing that. We await better times. ■

Trust and customer loyalty are vital to survival



In a freewheeling tete-a-tete, **Puneet Chhatwal**, President, Hotel Association of India, MD and CEO, Indian Hotels Company Limited (IHCL), talks about the impact of the Covid storm, the plans for reboot and the huge role Hospitality will play in the country's economic revival.



How has the IHCL Group helped to showcase the breadth of Indian Hospitality and grandeur?

The IHCL is a 120-year-old company. Founder of the Tata Group, Jamsetji Tata, opened the first hotel, The Taj Mahal Palace, in Bombay, in 1903. Since then, IHCL has offered an unrivalled fusion of warm Indian hospitality, world-class service and modern luxury.

It is renowned for its unique service philosophy, or Tajness. "Tajness" is a culture of sincere care and warmth. It is the soul of the company which evokes a strong emotional connect with customers and stakeholders.

Today, IHCL has a global portfolio of over 221 hotels, including 55 under development, across four continents, 12 countries, in over 100 locations. IHCL has put many destinations like Rajasthan, Kerala, Goa, Andamans, and more recently, North-East India, on the global tourist map.

We have brought to life authentic experiences at unique Palaces, like the Taj Lake Palace, Rambagh Palace, Umaid Bhawan Palace and Falaknuma Palace. It is the only Indian Hospitality Group to have marquee hotels in New York, London, San Francisco and Dubai, among others. IHCL is also the first company to develop a tourism circuit of unique luxury jungle lodges, under the Taj Safaris brand.

The IHCL is not just a Hospitality company, but a Hospitality eco-system with a varied portfolio and a host of ancillary businesses, under Expressions, including India's first branded homestay, the amã Stays & Trails, The Chambers, Jiva Spa, niu&nau salons and the Khazanas that cater to a large and varied audience.

What are the spectacular glimpses of Tajness that you would mention in this landmark year of Independence?

At a time when trust and customer loyalty are vital to a brand's survival, Taj is the hallmark of iconic

Hospitality, and has been rated as the "World's Strongest Hotel Brand 2021" by Brand Finance. It is the first-ever Indian Hospitality company to be featured in that list, elevating India's position on the global tourism map. It has been rated "India's Strongest Hospitality Brand" for the second consecutive year. IHCL's community-led, innovative business initiatives during the challenging year of the pandemic stand out as key milestones in its 120-year-old legacy.

Some details of iconic gestures and moments?

The iconic Taj Mahal Palace in Mumbai, India's first luxury hotel, predates the construction of the Gateway of India by two decades, and has many notable firsts to its name. It was the first hotel in India to have electricity, the first to have a 24-hour coffee shop, Shamiana, and started with Mumbai's first-ever licenced bar, the Harbour Bar, among other firsts.

The hotel has played an illustrious role in the country's freedom struggle, with the last Viceroy, Lord Louis Mountbatten, giving Independent India's first speech from the footsteps of the Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai.

The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai, has secured image trademark rights, joining an elite club of distinguished structures like the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building, and Sydney Opera House.

What are the innovations being implemented across the IHCL group?

Leveraging on technology, we launched Qmin, IHCL's culinary and food delivery platform across 18 cities in India and six countries, delivering signature dishes from over 70 of IHCL's restaurants. The Qmin app, available on Android and iOS, was developed in-house, within six weeks. We are the first Indian Hospitality Group to implement such an innovation.

With safety and social distancing being the need in Covid times, IHCL initiated Tajness-A Commitment Restrengthened, enhanced safety and hygiene protocols, leveraging digital technologies. I-ZEST, IHCL's Zero-Touch Service Transformation, a suite

“

We have expanded the boundaries of creativity and innovation, to explore new avenues. We developed alternate revenue streams, and launched Qmin, the food delivery platform, within weeks”

of digital solutions was introduced to ensure social distancing, while maintaining seamless services.

How do the SeleQtions and amã properties add to the guest experience?

Both amã Stays & Trails and SeleQtions were launched in 2019 to cater to the changing requirements of guests. With consumer sentiment and behaviour moving towards a preference for private stays, amã evolved to meet the demands for homestays. The first branded homestay portfolio in the country, amã offers 44 bungalows across unique destinations such as Munnar, Coorg, Chikmagalur, Alibaug and Goa, among others.

SeleQtions is a collection of 16 hotels across key cities, emerging resort locations, non-metros and district capitals. Each handpicked marquee hotel has a distinct character, that explores a unique story that celebrates the legacy of time, a sense of place, or a specific theme.

Is there a new vision for the service retail offerings?

IHCL added enhanced privileges at The Chambers and expanded its footprint across geographies. The newly-renovated Chambers was recently introduced



at Taj Mahal, New Delhi. The Chambers has presence in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Chennai and Dubai. It will be introduced in hubs like London, New York and Bangalore.

With the re-imagined salon experience of niu&nau, IHCL is well poised to capture the growing demand of the beauty and grooming industry. We currently have three saloons, which will soon scale to more locations.

What value does Qmin add to customer experience?

Qmin was born from a vision fuelled by guest feedback, to allow people to enjoy their favourite restaurant experience in the comfort of home. Qmin has served over one million happy customers in the first year itself.

The Qmin app, which is the only app in the country that can serve the same curated menu to over 2,000 people across many cities simultaneously, leverages IHCL's extensive network of hotels and is a popular choice for those hosting virtual celebrations, socially distanced gathering and meetings. With over three lakh downloads, the app has an ever-growing user base, and is also available in the US, UK, UAE, Singapore, Hong Kong and Germany, and one may seamlessly order a Qmin experience for family and loved ones in India.

We have collaborated with the world's largest brewer, AB InBev, to set up India's first on-site brewery pub at a five-star location. We opened the first 7Rivers Brewpub at Taj MG Road, Bengaluru, during the pandemic and will be expanding to other cities soon.

Tell us about your journey of re-structuring IHCL.

IHCL's brand architecture has evolved, keeping pace with the times. The company re-imagined its brandscape, and adopted a "house of brands" approach in



2018, in an endeavour to unlock the growth potential.

While the iconic Taj and Vivanta brands were retained as the dominant brands in the luxury segment, a new brand, SeleQtions, was conceptualized, to look at independent hotels with character and a distinct identity.

Ginger was repositioned with a completely new brand identity to have a significant presence that addressed the mid-scale segment, while catering to the aspirations of the new and younger customer profiles. Currently, Ginger is expanding rapidly and will be present in the top 80 cities of the country, including micro-markets.

We will continue to expand our brand offerings and sign new hotels across geographies. We continued our growth momentum in FY 2020-21 and were recognised by HVS Anarock as the highest growth hospitality company in India for the year.

Who do you count as your biggest assets at this turning point in history?

There is no travel without travellers and there is no hospitality without those who create experiences and offer a touch of warmth and care day-after-day to travellers, and experience seekers.

People, whether guests or employees, will always be the

Hospitality industry's biggest assets. At IHCL, the long-standing trust of our guests, associates and stakeholders, will always be the foundation on which we will continue to strengthen and expand our customer-centric offerings, while keeping community at the heart of all that we do.

IHCL has always been a hallmark of resilience and our organizational culture with the core values of Trust, Awareness & Joy help us withstand and discover new opportunities.

The recent rating of Taj as the World's Strongest Hotel Brand and India's Strongest Hospitality Brand 2021 reiterates the power of our stakeholders' trust in us, and our resilient spirit. This inspires us to further innovate, thereby opening the path to recovery in the coming months.

How has the pandemic affected Aspiration 2022?

IHCL had achieved 80% of Aspiration 2022 in 50% of the allocated time. In response to the pandemic, we detailed a comprehensive five-point mitigation strategy—R.E.S.E.T 2020—that is catering to the rapidly changing market conditions, shifting government policies and dynamic customer needs. It is focusing on reimagining business models, implementing various operational excellence interventions required

for safety and hygiene, revenue enhancement, cost optimisation and financial prudence.

To assure our clients, we launched a reinvigorated spirit of Tajness. Tajness, A Commitment Restrengthened, is our promise to provide the heartfelt warmth of our signature Hospitality, with assured safety and hygiene standards.

We have explored new growth opportunities through a variety of innovations. With R.E.S.E.T 2020, we are confident of overcoming the challenges posed by Covid-19.

Given IHCL's scale, how much do the new properties lean on the management-contract mix? How is asset management going to change?

We are a portfolio of 221 hotels, including 54 under development. We want to create value through an asset-light growth. All our new signings were done through an asset-light model approach, and predominantly management contracts. Our managed portfolio mix in 2017-18 when we rolled out Aspiration 2022 was 32%. We are at a 46% today and aim to reach 50%.

What has been Hospitality's biggest learning?

The crisis has presented an opportunity to adapt. It inspired us to re-imagine our business and pushed us to think like a start-up. We have expanded the boundaries of our creativity and innovative skills, to explore new avenues. We developed alternate revenue streams and launched Qmin, the food delivery platform across 18 cities, with our own mobile app.

At IHCL, we have always believed that community is the reason for our existence, and we continued to be guided by our values and purpose during the pandemic. We launched "Meals to Smiles" which served over millions of meals to healthcare workers, migrants and others.



“

No business school teaches you how to run a business on zero revenues, which happened in the first wave. The industry has adapted and innovated. Business has started improving. We will emerge stronger than before”

Does the economic slowdown make you apprehensive?

Hospitality is a cyclical business. Companies build hotels during the downturn and open in time to capture the increased demand. The pandemic has been unprecedented. No business school teaches you how to run a business on zero revenues which happened in the first wave. But the industry adapted and innovated. Business has started improving, though it has not reached the pre-pandemic levels. It is a very resilient industry. I am confident we will come out stronger than before.

What's your message to keep the outlook positive?

As a key contributor to the GDP and being one of the largest sources of employment, the Hospitality industry is an invaluable asset to India's economic development. The recovery of Hospitality and Tourism will be key to India's economic revival.

While the current slowdown has impacted us all immensely, we are amongst the most resilient industries. With agility, innovation and collaboration, we will emerge from this stronger than ever. Travel will return as usual, and when it does, it may surpass pre-Covid numbers. Travelling is a fundamental need and people can't stay without it for long. ■



COVER **S**TORY

ICONS OF TIMELESS LUXURY

Indian Hospitality is more than a splendid array of breath-taking amenities, that help to relax and rejuvenate. Some of the Hotels are world renowned landmarks, and the shortest route to a discovery of India. Pages of history come alive at some famous venues. And yet, they are in synch with the times, bringing in AI, IoT and AR tools, to elevate modern guest experiences.

HISTORIC MOMENT

Lord Mountbatten announcing India's Independence from the steps of The Taj Mahal Palace, Mumbai



Indian Hospitality is intricately woven with the country's superlative cultural and aesthetic values. The Incredible India story rides on Indian Hospitality in many ways, offering tantalising glimpses of high-end luxury, restaurants that provide delightful epicurean treats, boutique properties that curate immersive experiences, architectural marvels and splendid interior stories. For countless foreign visitors, Indian Hospitality is the first interaction with quintessential Indian design, art, architecture, culinary choices and the soul of India's refined culture where guest is elevated to the status of God.

Experience design has always been a source of a competitive edge for Indian Hospitality. The past is restored carefully for posterity to explore all its delicate nuances. Nostalgia is a great reference point. The slivers of history are kept alive for a mirror to a world where the biggest names have nodded in appreciation. Grandeur does not belittle small details, and each detail is celebrated with veneration.

The search for stories in the corridors and hallways of the Imperial, that opened its doors in the 1930s, in Delhi, is never futile. Here Independence leaders met to discuss the fate of new India. The "museum Hotel" has among the most arresting public displays of colonial images and memorabilia in all of Asia. Works by British wives, lieutenants in the British army, architecture historian James Fergusson, captivating lithographs, engravings and mezzotints that deck up the Imperial walls, makes it a cultural nerve centre in the heart of the bustling-metropolis. Lady Willingdon personally supervised the interiors, carpets, chandeliers and even the lion insignia of the Hotel. The Hotel, now 70 years old, was part of Lutyens' grand vision to build a luxury Hotel in the new country's capital.

GOING BACK IN TIME

Independence leaders met to discuss the fate of new India at The Imperial in New Delhi. The venue, the 1911 restaurant, is an abode for discerning diners showcasing Raj legacy like no other





A FAVOURITE LANDMARK

Indian Hotel industry would not have been where it is today were it not for Jamsetji Tata's vision to build the majestic Taj Mahal overlooking the Gateway of India in Mumbai in 1903



STATELY SENTINEL

ITDC's The Ashok was built in 1956 when the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was looking to host world leaders and dignitaries for the ninth UNESCO conference

Another Delhi landmark, ITDC's The Ashok was built in 1956 when the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was looking to host world leaders and dignitaries for the ninth UNESCO conference. The Ashok was important for a country eager to make its mark on the global platform. The contours of the part of Raisina Hill, on which the Hotel is built, are beautifully incorporated in the design. The country's first state-owned five star Hotel stands on 25 acres of parkland donated to the government by the Prince Regent of Jammu and Kashmir, Karan Singh, and designed by architect EB Doctor, in the Indo-Modernist style. As a five-star destination, The Ashok may be among many today, but its story never fails to fascinate.

Securing the number one hotel brand position, in the 75th year of India's independence is a historic, though an expected moment for the IHCL Group, that manages the Taj Hotels. The benchmark in Design and Hospitality for the world is set by them. Indian Hotel industry would not have been where it is today were it not for Jamsetji Tata's vision to build the majestic Taj Mahal overlooking the Gateway of India in Mumbai in 1903. Its Florentine Gothic dome is the country's most favourite landmark. The Taj in Mumbai opened, with grand attractions, electric lifts, mood lights, bars, all-day dining and orchestra. The same year, Maidens Metropolitan Hotel, in Civil Lines, Delhi, opened its doors. It was the most expensive hotel in Delhi in the early 1900s.

The story of India's most feted hotelier Mr MS Oberoi starting with a job at the front desk of Hotel Cecil in 1922—the Hotel he was to later acquire in 1944—is legendary. The Oberoi Hotels, the grand Vilas, and the Trident brands have blended the world's finest Hospitality with unique architecture. Boundaries of art and living merge here.

SEPIA TONED PAST

The Great Eastern in Kolkata has been restored from almost collapsing debris. In its spanking new avatar, the Hertiage wing continues to draw interest



The three lovingly restored blocks of The Lalit Great Eastern in Kolkata—Edwardian, Victorian and Contemporary—bring us closer to over 180 years of three different eras of history, the time when Asia's first luxury Hotel was a favoured hangout of the East India Company officers, and called the "jewel of the east".

The ITC group of hotels, launched in 1975, has been a frontrunner in green hospitality. The Responsible Luxury commitment of ITC Hotels blends elements of nature to deliver a unique value proposition to guests, conscious of their responsibility towards the planet. The LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certification ensures that eco-tourism remains part of the grand vision of luxury stays.

Art, design and hospitality merge in The Park Hotels, of the Apeejay Surrendra Group, started in 1967, with the opening of the Group's first Hotel in Kolkata. The Chalet Hotels, owned by K Raheja Corp, are present in key gateway cities of the country, like Mumbai, Pune, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, and drive the growth of new business districts and development of the country. The chain is recognised with established global brands such as Sheraton (Starwood Hotels and Resorts), Westin and JW Marriott.

No story of refined Indian Luxury is complete without the mention of the Leela Group of Hotels, started in 1986 by Late Capt CP Krishnan Nair at the age of 65, when most people begin to think of retiring! The Leela Palaces, Hotels and Resorts comprise one of the biggest and most celebrated indigenous group of hotels in India. The Radisson Hotels Group is expanding fast and is the third largest chain of hotels in India. The global hospitality major got rebranded to Radisson Hotel Group in 2018 from what was called the Carlson Rezidor Hotel Group earlier.



REPURPOSED HERITAGE

During the Raj, the piano was considered a clear sign of aristocracy and affluence. This century old piano of German make in the lovingly restored ritzy property, The Great Eastern in Kolkata is an endearing symbol of lovers of antiquity

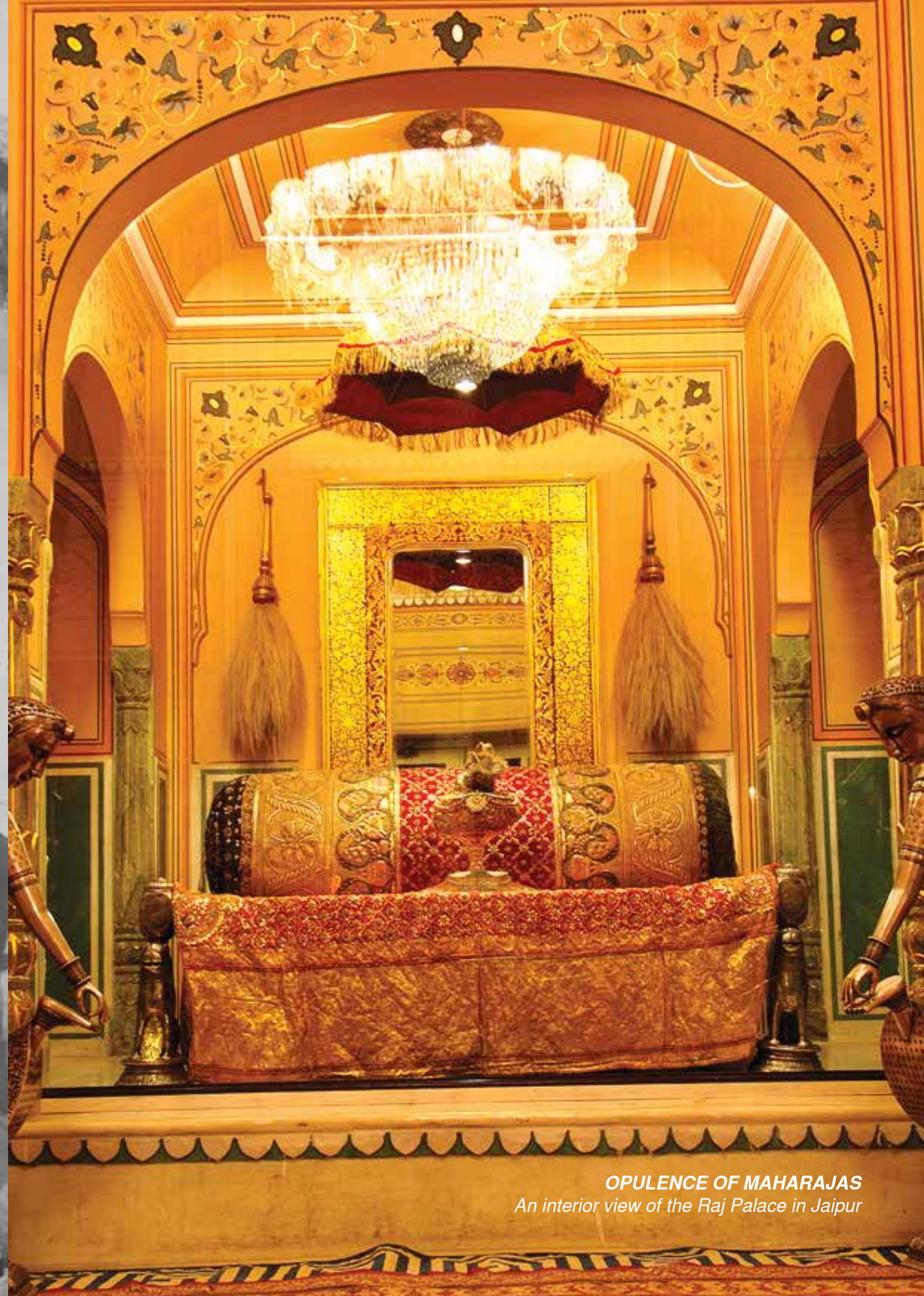


ARCHED GATEWAYS

Jaipur's Raj Palace, of circa 1727, represents the Pink City's fabled charm and grandeur. India's grand hospitality has not only frequently delved into the past for inspiration, it has taken care to restore many artisan legacies of the past. The Raj Palace is one such example of restored heritage

TALES OF THE PAST

A professional elephant at Raj Palace, Jaipur. Taking an elephant ride was symbolic of the good times



OPULENCE OF MAHARAJAS

An interior view of the Raj Palace in Jaipur

OASIS OF CALM

Fondly referred to as the Grand Dame of Chowringhee, The Oberoi Grand has been a loved Hospitality venue in Kolkata for more than a century





SPLENDID ROYALTY
*The Taj Lake Palace in Udaipur,
feted by the who's who of the world,
is the first palace hotel of IHCL*

A TOUCH OF LOVE

The Oberoi Amarvilas, Agra, offers unforgettable experiences of the Mughal times. Luxury Hospitality has often taken on the role of being the cultural ambassadors, near organically. Local inspirations and authentic experiences, along with excellent amenities, lift Hospitality from a mere transactional role to a transformational one





A TRANQUIL HAVEN
Embrace the languid and
laid-back life at the Taj Exotica
Resort and Spa in Goa

A SHIMMERING DISCOVERY

The Oberoi, Mumbai enjoys an unrivalled position on the exclusive Marine Drive, with unparalleled views of the ocean and the Queen's Necklace. The hotel has been recognised as "Best Hotel in the World by Institutional Investor, USA 2014"



**A UNIQUE IMPRINT ON
FOREIGN SHORES**
The Pierre, New York, A Taj Hotel

With Heritage hotels, Indian Hospitality has taken one step further in closely aligning itself with the India Story. The Heritage tourism movement gained momentum when the Indian Heritage Hotels Association was started in 1990. The purpose was to restore the rich cultural, architectural and historical heritage of India, while reviving many old forts and palaces and boosting traveller interest in these iconic places. Jaipur's Raj Palace, of circa 1727, represents the Pink City's fabled charm and grandeur. Hotel Chanakya in Puri, the Swosti Group of Hotels in Odisha, the innumerable Hotels and Resorts in forts and palaces of Rajasthan, the Neemrana Hotels have all made it their business to conserve India's vast and mesmerising heritage.

There are many other gems whose tales show how Indian Hospitality has conserved icons of the past. Among others, Lalitha Mahal, built by the erstwhile Maharaja Nalwadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar of Mysore

to host his most important guest, the Viceroy of India, at the foot of the Chamundi hill, offers an experience of princely living in a modern setting. The architecture was inspired by St Paul's Cathedral in London. The Tripura Castle in Meghalaya, built in the early 1920s by Maharaja Bir Bikram, is among the first Heritage hotels of the north-east. The hotel is located in the Annexe of the Summer Palace of the Royal Family of the Manikya Dynasty. The two luxury Samode hotels in Rajasthan provide world-class facilities along with impeccable hospitality. The Samode Haveli was built 225 years ago as a residence of the rulers of Samode, and it is still occupied by their descendants, who have converted their home into a luxury hotel. Samode Bagh is spread over 20 acres of lush gardens—an amalgamation of contemporary luxuries and traditional warmth.

In the mid-priced hotel sector, the Lemontree is fast leaving its impact. This award-winning hotel chain opened its first property with 49 rooms in 2004. The chain now has over 80 hotels. The Sarovar Hotels, founded in 1994, blend convenience and modern comforts. There are many such Hotels and resorts that have pushed the benchmarks in Hospitality and Design.

Luxury Hospitality's decline in the west and rise in the east is in no small measure due to the remarkable service, exclusive privileges, design, detailing,

culinary feasts, finest wines and caviars, and many visual and soulful treats, that Hospitality in India is renowned for. They have set the dizzying standards that many global Hotels struggle to replicate.

This is an industry with huge surface glamour, but behind the sparkling white linen and shining dining rooms, is a story of strong brands that have weathered the storms. It's an industry that has seen it all, from 9/11 to the 2004 tsunami, the demonetisation and the global meltdown, to sundry infectious diseases that have impacted the sector at various times. All through, Indian Hospitality has displayed its resilient side.

Even while staring at its new albatross, vacant rooms for months and months, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Indian Hospitality displayed its side of care. Expensive hand-knotted carpets and hand-worked European chandeliers were removed to overnight convert plush rooms into emergency ICUs and quarantine

quarters, many feted star chefs moved to stirring charity meals, or catering to an increasingly growing dial-a-meal services, to somehow cobble up hope, from wherever it comes. A far cry from the fabled glamour that has hosted the who's who of the world, and left them all marvelled by the breadth and the grandeur of excellent services. But when the times are a changing, winners move with the time.

At the end of the second wave, green shoots are visible, with tourists queuing up to take a short break, or looking for intimate wedding

packages in the safety of hotels that promise superb hygiene levels, 100 per cent sanitised and gloved, with AI taking care, in a contactless world, of customer queries for bookings and discounted offers.

Today's upscale guests participate in a variety of activities, other than the once popular cards rooms and billiards rooms. With luxury spas, golfing greens, cultural entertainment, and artefacts shopping, guests are kept thoroughly entertained. Increasingly, hotels are gathering information about customer preferences through analytic techniques that extract behavioural insights, to services even better for guests who can easily have more to be pleased. Even while preserving its stately past, Indian Hospitality is in synch with the times, with latest technology, and custom packages. India is the seventh largest tourism economy in the world. The Hospitality sector is a key pillar of Incredible India. ■

The Heritage tourism movement gained momentum when the Indian Heritage Hotels Association was started in 1990. The purpose was to restore the rich cultural, architectural and historical heritage of India, while reviving many old forts and palaces and boosting traveller interest in these iconic places



A shot of hope from vaccine certificates



Suman Billa

Director, Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Development, UNWTO

It's important to open unhindered travel for vaccinated visitors for Tourism to claw out of the woods. Ensuring Covid-appropriate behaviour at all times will further break chains of despondency.

We are now approaching a defining moment in our struggle against Covid-19. Over the past few months, we have seen several nations achieve considerable progress in their vaccination drives, reaching within hitting distance of achieving herd immunity. The US, UK, countries from the European Union, Israel and Singapore are amongst the noteworthy countries.

Over the past few months, we have seen the rise of new mutations of the Covid-19 virus which have emerged as variants of concern in several parts of the world with the most prominent in recent time being the Delta variant which caused a second wave in India. The virus is mutating further into the Delta plus and other variants across the world.

The Delta variant has reached the UK and Portugal where it is the dominant strain and is gaining ground in Spain, US, and China. This gives us the opportunity to test the efficacy of vaccination in a real-life situation, especially in the UK since it has covered 70% of its population with at least one dose of the vaccine and 58% with both the doses. Over the coming days, we would be able to judge with reasonable accuracy as to how vaccination affects the spread and impact of the pandemic.

All evidence thus far points to the strong possibility of partial success, where vaccines would drastically reduce fatality and hospitalization, but may not be successful in stamping out the virus altogether. There are early reports that suggest that 97% of those who are hospitalized in the US at present on account of Covid are unvaccinated. This outcome may have several impacts.

The first may be that we need to be prepared for the new Covid normal, like the Singapore model, where they assume that the Covid-19 virus would continue to exist and that its impact on society can be mitigated through vaccinations and by taking appropriate precautions.

The second impact may be the necessity to regularly upgrade the vaccine and administer it from time to time, to make it effective against the evolving variants.

The third impact concerns around vaccine equity, as vaccine availability especially to the least developed countries is still a big question.



**TOAST OF THE
TWENTY FIRST
CENTURY.**

**I AM THE TOAST OF THE NEW WORLD. THEN AND NOW. THE PRODIGY OF PRODIGES.
CREATOR OF MY OWN DESTINY. PROVENANCE OF GREATNESS. SYMBOL OF A CEASELESS SEARCHING.
THE SPIRIT OF NEW FRONTIERS OF IMAGINATION. CATALYST OF THE UNBELIEVABLE AND THE
UNIMAGINED. A CELEBRATION OF THE ENTREPRENEURIAL. AN ODE TO YOUTH AND ITS ETERNAL
OPTIMISM. THE ELIXIR OF A NEW GENERATION. BORN OF FEARLESS DARING AND BOLD THINKING.
REDEFINING AND RE-CRAFTING TRADITION. CAST IN GRANDE CHAMPAGNE COGNAC CASKS.
VELVETY, SMOOTH BUT WITH THE CHUTZPAH OF THE UNEXPECTED. AN UNDEFLECTING PASSION.
THE SPIRIT OF OUR TIMES. RESTED FOR FIFTEEN YEARS. AWOKEN TO MARK EVERY MOMENT
THAT CALLS FOR A CELEBRATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY.**

“

India should open-up to any international visitor who is fully vaccinated. An additional RT-PCR test can be prescribed in case the visitor is arriving from a country of concern ”

The fourth impact, which is the most crucial, is that it would give a big head start to the developed nations which have been able to rapidly vaccinate their population and hence are able to restore their productivity to optimum levels, widening the economic disparity between them and the nations which make slow progress in vaccination.

This is likely to affect the tourism sector also, most notably in the way in which the nations which have achieved high levels of vaccination and have been able to contain the virus, create travel blocks and enable each other's citizens to travel freely. The Green Pass of the European Union is a prime example of such an arrangement. It is likely that these travel blocks will enter into arrangements with other similar blocks to expand free travel. It is not clear at this stage as to when we get to see an agnostic system that enables free travel if the person is fully vaccinated, irrespective of the country from which he is travelling.

Those nations which can leverage such arrangements are likely to revive their tourism sectors earlier. International travel to India is likely to be delayed on account of the second wave and the perceptual bias that it has engendered. However, the high seroprevalence, low case load and rapid vaccination presents us with a window of opportunity to take a bold approach and kick start the tourism sector in earnest. The game plan should be to leverage the significant purchasing power within the country reflected in 24 million Indians travelling abroad, spending an estimated \$25 billion, by using a two-pronged strategy of enabling and incentivizing the travel and tourism sectors.

Based on the global evidence so far, India should enable unhindered travel to all those who have been vaccinated and present valid certificates while following the specified precautions like face masks, social distancing, and so on. Most nations are now doing away with the requirement of quarantine for fully vaccinated people returning from abroad which

removes the disincentive to travel. India should open-up to any international visitor who is fully vaccinated. An additional RT-PCR test can be prescribed in case the visitor is arriving from a country of concern.

At the destination level, a regime of new Covid normal, on the lines of the Singapore model, may be prescribed along with vaccinating all the front-facing travel and tourism staff. A national committee with the Ministries of Health, Tourism and Civil Aviation along with representatives from the states and the industry should be set up to prescribe and harmonize guidelines to make travel predictable and safe.

On the incentive side, we could look at policy instruments like extending the scope of LTC to utilize future travel entitlements, in addition to the cash advance system and enable direct tax benefits for corporates for MICE activities, to kick start demand.

Lastly, the pandemic is an opportunity to rethink and reorganize the tourism sector on a responsible and sustainable footing. ■



Unleash the power of SmartDose™



01 SIMPLER

Dispense correct dosage to keep cleaning efficiency at par

02 SMARTER

Maintenance-free system with a portable, on-the-go bottle

03 SAFER

Tamperproof pack with drip and spill resistant technology for safer use

Available in TASKI R1, R2, R3 & R9

IDEAL FOR

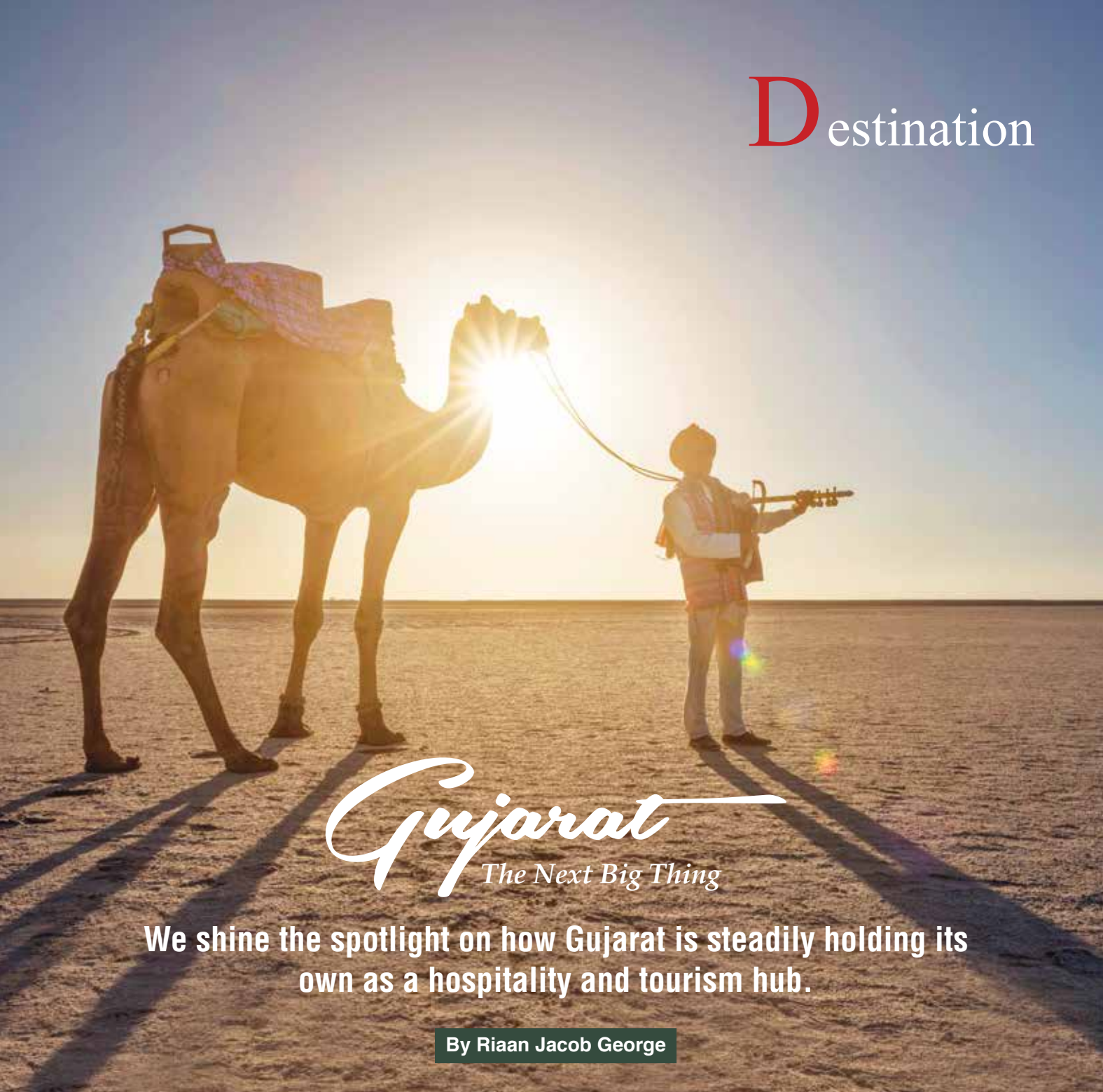
AIRPORTS | MALLS | RETAIL STORES | MULTIPLEXES | HOSPITALITY
OFFICE BUILDINGS | EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES | INFRASTRUCTURE



Diversey India Hygiene Pvt. Ltd.
Fifth Floor, Akruti Centre Point, MIDC,
Chakala Industrial Area, Andheri East,
Mumbai 400093



**CONTACT
US TO
KNOW
MORE**



Gujarat

The Next Big Thing

We shine the spotlight on how Gujarat is steadily holding its own as a hospitality and tourism hub.

By Riaan Jacob George

A quick glance at the Instagram feed of Gujarat Tourism is enough to show you the sheer diversity and uniqueness of the offering that this state packs in. The account features a variety of attractions ranging from the Girmal Waterfall and the Bhadreswar Jain Tirth to Junagadh's Upkarkot Fort and Ahmedabad's Sarkhej na Roza. The state is fuelled by a desire to position itself as a serious player in tourism. In addition, Gujarat's industrial might has led to large volumes of incoming traffic on the business travel segment. The obvious consequence of both the leisure and business tourism influx is a major boom in the hospitality segment in the state.

The Hospitality Wave

In recent times, possibly the biggest piece of hospitality news for the country has come from Gujarat, with the opening of The Leela Gandhinagar, built atop the Gandhinagar Capital Railway Station. That the Indian ultra-luxury group chose to situate its project in Gujarat's capital, atop a railway station is a very strategic move, to perhaps create a demand, experts say. "The Leela Gandhinagar is a milestone development and underscores our commitment to the Honourable Prime Minister's vision of transforming the urban Indian landscape with state-of-the-art



infrastructure in order to drive economic growth," says Anuraag Bhatnagar, Chief Operating Officer, The Leela Palaces, Hotels & Resorts. By way of facts, the Leela Gandhinagar is the tallest building in the city and is the first luxury hotel in the country to be constructed on top of a conventional railway station and is located near the Dandi Kutir Museum. "The hotel perfectly complements Mahatma Mandir Convention and Exhibition Centre," says Bhatnagar underscoring that this MICE complex will generate demand for the destinations and position it as one of the most sought-after convention centres in the world. In the very same vein, another Indian hospitality giant, ITC Hotels, is poised to launch its flagship ITC Narmada property in Ahmedabad, boasting 300 keys, at the heart of Ahmedabad, also creating a huge demand for business and MICE travellers. ITC Hotels, in addition, also has its premium Welcomhotel in Vadodara, Ahmedabad. The corporate travel segment is indeed emerging, says Kerrie Hannaford, Vice President Commercial, Accor India & South Asia. "Gujarat is an industrial state that sees a lot of corporate travellers, with places such as GIFT City emerging as business hubs. Our hotels in Gujarat are well-positioned to cater to guests that are travelling for both business and leisure. Grand

Mercure Gandhinagar GIFT City is located at the heart of the city, India's first international financial service centre being developed on the periphery of Ahmedabad city, en route to Gandhinagar," says the spokesperson of Accor India, which also has the Grand Mercure Vadodara Surya Palace, strategic for weddings and MICE groups as well as Novotel Ahmedabad, which is located in close proximity to the commercial, industrial and retail hubs of the city.

While the hospitality front is, as you would expect booming, there's much to talk about with respect to tourist offerings from Gujarat.



"Traditionally, Gujarat was not considered one of the major tourism hubs for this country such as Goa, Kerala or neighbouring Rajasthan. However, things are changing now as the state is marketing itself smartly and investing in infrastructure. As a result, the state could be on the radar for both domestic and international tourists, looking for a new and unique offering, without going down the beaten path," says Siddharth Bhatia of FSR Travels, a travel company specialising in HNI travel.

For instance, the Rann Utsav is a rather unusual experience created only recently to boost tourism in the Kutch desert, where, every December, a festival celebrates music, art, culture and food from the region. The response has been overwhelming so far and has put the Rann of Kutch on the tourist map, effectively.

"As travel reopens, we are seeing a trend where guests are looking at experiential travel. Gujarat has emerged as a unique cultural, historical and experience-rich destination for travellers to explore. The state boasts a truly



differentiated tourism experience, increasingly sought out per emerging trends we see. More travellers are looking for getaways in nature, sustainable travel experiences and stays in unique accommodation formats close to local communities, Gujarat's diverse offerings cater to that," says Amanpreet Singh Bajaj, General Manager, Airbnb India, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

The Statue of Unity

The proverbial jewel in Gujarat's crown, albeit a more recent one is the gargantuan Statue of Unity, the world's tallest statue. Built along the banks of the Narmada, this 600 ft depiction of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was constructed at an estimated cost of INR 2,700 crore, this statue has become a massive draw for tourists in the state. But it's not only the statue that tourists are interested in. The newly minted Kevadia Jungle Safari, adjoining the statue complex, is spread across 1,300 acres and features dozens of wild animal species for tourists to appreciate.

Nature Tourism

While on the subject of nature tourism, the Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary continues to attract lion-seeking tourists from across the country and globe. The area also boasts a sizeable tourist infrastructure with hotels like the Taj group's The Gateway Hotel Gir Forest as well as other independent players such as Woods at Sasan and The Fern Gir Resort

The Velavadar National Park along the Gulf of Khambat is picturesque and famous for its population of black bucks, among other species. The gorgeous plains of Little Rann of Kutch is where you can spot the indigenous Asiatic Wild Ass.

Heritage and Architecture

More recently, the Harappan-era city of Dholavira in Kutch was included in the UNESCO's World Heritage List, adding one more feather to the cap of the state tourism board. This is the fourth UNESCO-stamped spot in the Gujarat after Champaner, Rani Ki Vav and the heritage centre of Ahmedabad. Chief Minister Vijay Rupani tweeted, "It is a matter of immense pride that the UNESCO has conferred the World Heritage tag to Dholavira. This shows the firm commitment of our Honourable Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi towards promoting Indian culture and heritage." Dholavira came on the radar of tourists looking for archaeological sites during the famous Kutch Rannotsav, which has gained tremendous momentum over the past few years.

Spiritual Tourism

It is, however, the cultural and spiritual tourists that continue to dominate Gujarat's inbound statistics. Take, for instance, visitors to the world-famous Sabarmati





Ashram in Ahmedabad. Gandhinagar's Dandi Kutir Museum retraces the steps of Mahatma Gandhi through multimedia presentations and installations. Architecture buffs also head off the beaten path towards the small town of Patan, where the ancient stepwell of Rani Ki Vav is an absolute wonder. Similarly spiritual tourism is a big segment of the overall traffic. Leading the pack of spiritual spots is the Shree Somnath Jyotirlinga Temple, which, before the pandemic, welcomed scores of devotees from across the country. This temple, with its idyllic location along the west coast, is dedicated to Lord Shiva and stands out with its magnificent architecture and ambience. Some of the important spiritual spots across Gujarat, encompassing both the Hindu and Muslim faiths, are Shree Dhvarkadhish Shrine, Sidi Saiyyed Mosque, Gandhinagar's Akshardham temple and Ahmedabad's 15th-century Jama Masjid. Without missing the stunning temple city of Palitana,

which boasts 1,300 Jain temples within its complex.

Another UNESCO-heritage site is the Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park, an ancient complex dating back to the 8th century and features a unique mix of palaces, temples, mosques, mausoleums and pavilions, which stand as testimony to the once flourishing kingdom. Visitors to the city of Vadodara cannot miss the glorious Lakshmi Vilas Palace, home to the Gaekwad, the former rulers of the Baroda State. The palace is beautifully preserved and is a glimpse into the bygone era of Indian royalty.

While these verticals are the most recognised tourist draws for Gujarat, the state is tapping into unexplored markets to ensure more variety for tourists and revenue for stakeholders - wellness tourism, medical tourism, textile tourism and even uber-luxe tourism are some of the different segments that could be actively looked at. ■

The Way Forward

As per the Gujarat Tourism Policy 2021-25 report, the long-term mission of Gujarat as a tourism hub will include doubling the employment in the tourism sector and to become one of the leading states in India in terms of tourist numbers.

The report also indicates that Gujarat wants to increase the sectorial contribution in the range of 5-7 per cent in the GDP. Gujarat is also positioning itself as one of India's leading MICE destinations.

Other objectives are as follows: Promote Atmanirbhar and Vocal for Local principles to maximise benefits, encourage accreditation to all the key service providers within the state to create a large database and to encourage investment in the tourism sector. Sustainability is a major talking point in the tourism mission. The state board wants to ensure that at least half of new projects and one third of existing projects comply with sustainability standards.

Images courtesy: Tourism Corporation of Gujarat Limited
<https://www.gujarattourism.com>

THE LAST WORD



M P Bezbaruah

Secretary General
 Hotel Association of India

Has Covid-19 changed Tourism & Hospitality?

Change happens. Embrace it. Reset growth by focusing on sustainability and touchless services. However, the digital switch must not lose out on unique experiences

The book *Who Moved My Cheese?* by Dr Spencer Johnson, which sold 28 million copies, deals with the problem of change and illustrates that those who do not adapt to change perish. It's similar to Darwin's theory—those who adapt survive.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) looked at the emerging trends during Covid-19 and found that the popular choices now include closer-to-home travel, staycations, rural, nature-oriented, and open air. Health, safety concerns, flexibility in travel arrangements and bookings are key consumer concerns. There is a change in demographics with more young travellers. Consumers are more concerned about responsible travel, sustainable travel, local eco-systems, and authenticity of experience. Are these trends going to stay? How should the industry respond?

There are myriad ways to respond, to innovate and to think out-of-the-box solutions. Adversity brings new opportunities.

A study across 10 countries and 11,000 travellers, done by Edelman for Travelport, shows transparency about pricing, health and safety norms, flexibility in bookings and safety of personal data in digital transactions, as some of the major concerns of the consumers. Nearly half of the respondents

“
A study across 10 countries and 11,000 travellers, done by Edelman for Travelport
 ”

chose “trust” over all other factors when choosing a travel supplier. This factor explains why hotels have seen more of direct bookings. Consumers have been guided by the brand image and trust more than anything else.

It is inevitable that there will be a paradigm shift in the relationship with customers, as part of the new management strategy. This shift will be guided by data and technology. As technology is likely to be more openly available to everyone, innovation in using it is likely to provide the cutting edge. A recent study by two travel houses, Thomas Cook and SOTC, has shown that personal health and safety are the top concerns for 70% of the respondents, 80% preferred friendly and flexible cancellation policies, and 77% thought that in these uncertain times, transparent communication, guidance and reassurance from the service providers are essential.

“Trust”, it has been rightly said, is the new currency. Information sharing and communication with the consumer are going to be the most important management response requirements. As the pandemic has been unpredictable, and the protocols have been changing often and varying from place to place, the importance of providing up-to-date, authentic information cannot be overstated. It shows the service providers’ commitment and responsibility and enhances consumer confidence.

While responding to consumer concerns, digital transformation is the most important management tool. In a survey by Skift, a travel and hospitality media outlet, 78% of the travel and hospitality industry executives considered digital transformation more important than before. Digital transformation has its implications both for the supply side as well as the demand side. On the demand side, it facilitates communication and information flow. On the supply side, it will enable contactless experiences—checking-in, checking-out, opening the room, taking care of customer requirements, and improving health and hygiene. The possibilities are endless.

“The pandemic had brought tremendous awareness about sustainability. It has changed attitudes, and widened understanding about the imperatives of a sustainable approach”

While the primary objective of technology will be to build consumer confidence, it will also bring in a number of side benefits like flexibility in operations, providing agility to respond to market trends, customization and personalization, perhaps greater access to consumer data, which can be used, for a stronger relationship, feedback on services, and loyalty initiatives. In the long run, it will increase productivity and reduce costs.

However, a few questions arise, and answer to those will show the quality of imaginative management. Workcations, combining business and leisure is becoming the norm. How to make the connectivity hassle-free? How to provide home ambience for work? Will robots and contactless service take away the most distinguishing factor in hospitality service—personal touch and unique experience?

While the digital switch provides benefits of consumer data and online payment gateways, consumer confidence will be bolstered by assurances of personal data confidentiality, cyber security and protection against fraud.

The pandemic had brought tremendous awareness about sustainability. It has changed attitudes, and widened understanding about the imperatives of a sustainable approach. Tourism and environment have a two-way relationship. A clean environment is essential for tourism growth. Tourism can help in promoting such an environment, or in the reverse, may damage environment. UNWTO has often said that while only three points in Sustainable Development Goals directly mention tourism, tourism has a role to play in almost every goal. While so far, sustainability had been looked upon as a desirable objective, the pandemic has made it a necessity. Customers are more likely now to expect sustainability in behaviour and sensitivity to sustainable norms—reduced use of plastics, efficient energy use and water management, waste management, disaster management, human rights issues—as part of their choice.

It follows therefore that those who are proactive in these matters will have the advantage in the post-Covid competitive world. In a recent report, CII has emphasized this role—“enterprises are intrinsic to the sustainability solution.” Airlines are already talking of biofuel and have committed to carbon neutrality by 2050. It has been reported that the global carbon dioxide emissions fell by 6.4%—approximately 2.3 billion tons—in 2020 when travel had almost stopped.

Tourism will bounce back, so will demand. Competition for bookings will remain the battleground. Rapid changes are taking place. To quote *Who Moved My Cheese?* again: “Let go of old cheese quicker so you can find new cheese sooner.” ■



HOSPITALITY IN THE LAP OF LUXURY

Sizes Available
65 | 55

4K Ultra HD Smart Hospitality NanoCell TV | US761H

Take premium in-room guest experience one step further with LG's Smart Hospitality NanoCell Technology. Create immersive content and a perfect atmosphere that suits every visitor's mood.



LG Active LED Signage is also available for Lobby, Reception, Banquet & Boardrooms.

*Available only with LG Magic Remote. Not available in box.



GLACÉAU
smartwater

step out the smart way

change in place doesn't have to mean change in taste.

indulge in crisp tasting pure water wherever you go.

made **differently**



packaged drinking water.
GLACÉAU and smartwater are registered
trademarks of Energy Brands Inc.
this is only a brand name or trademark
and doesn't represent its true nature.